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ABSTRACT

To study the social and economic conditions where black farmers live, 342 southern counties, each having at least 25 black farmers, were identified. The counties were divided into five categories, four of which reflected the most common commodity type of black-operated farm and one which did not exhibit any common black-operated farm type. Most black farmers, it was found, live in slowly growing counties where nonfarm employment opportunities are limited. Social and economic conditions of blacks varied considerably among the regions, but blacks always lagged behind whites. Poverty rates among blacks ranged from 56.3 percent in the Delta Crop region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi) to 36.3 percent in the Atlantic Tobacco region (parts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia). Unemployment among black adults ranged from 15.1 percent in the Delta Crop region to 8.9 percent in the East Texas Beef region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas). Growth in jobs between 1970 and 1980 ranged from 4.4 percent in the Delta Crop region to 29.9 percent in the East Texas Beef region. The findings suggest that many black farm families would be better off financially if they left agriculture. Most black-operated farms are very small and cannot provide enough income to adequately support a family. More policies are needed which encourage economic growth in depressed rural areas for those who decide to leave farming. More education and job training in these areas could also help. (KH)

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Economic
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Development
Research
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Number 61

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Social and Economic Environment of Black Farmers

Robert A. Hoppe
Herman Bluestone
Virginia K. Getz

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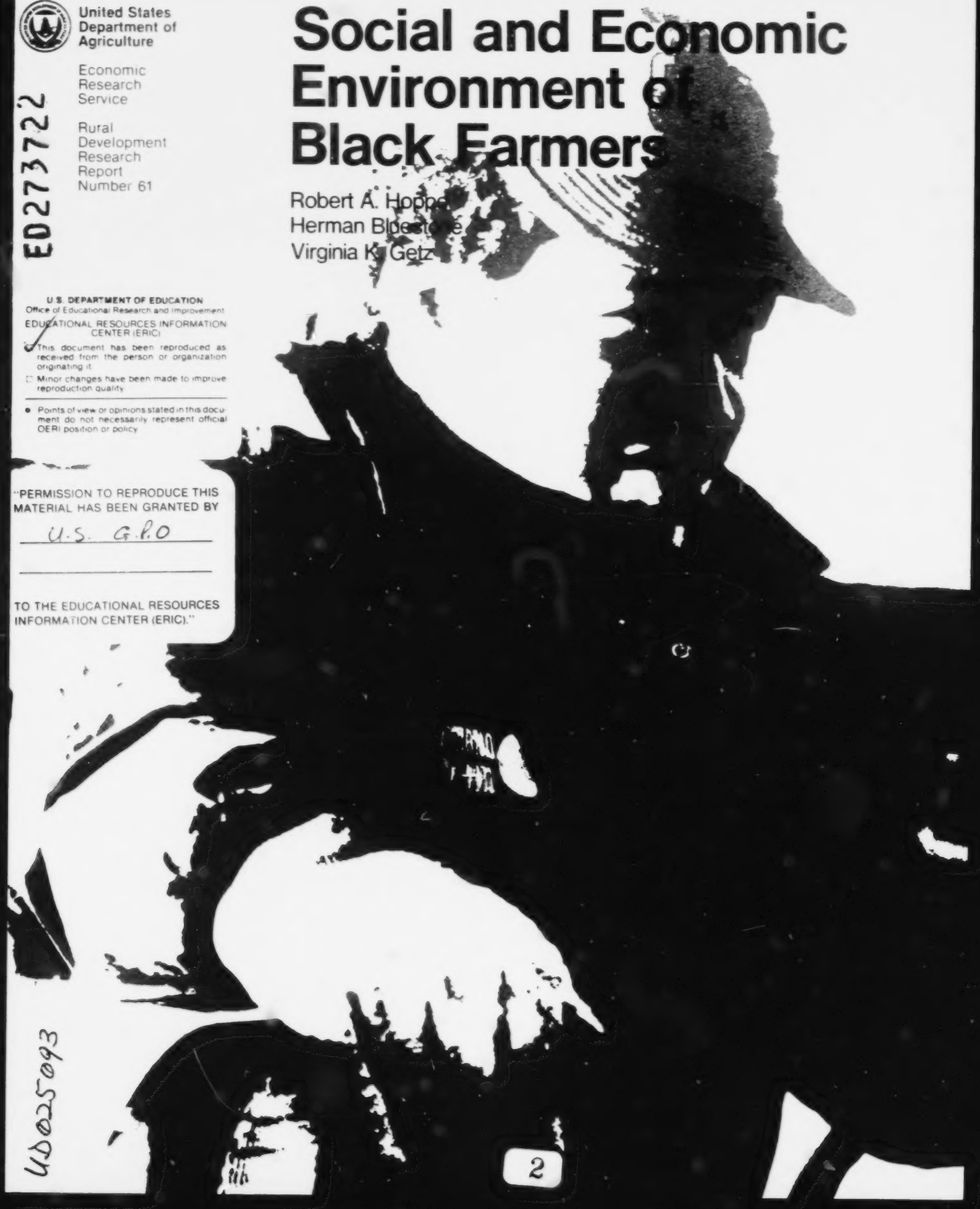

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Social and Economic Environment of Black Farmers. By Robert A. Hoppe, Herman Bluestone, and Virginia K. Getz. Agriculture and Rural Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rural Development Research Report No. 61.

Abstract

Most black farmers live in slowly growing southern counties. The authors identified 342 counties with at least 25 black farmers each and four regions based on the most common commodity produced. Social and economic conditions of blacks varied considerably among the regions, but blacks always lagged behind whites. Poverty rates among blacks ranged from 56.3 percent in the Delta Crop region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi) to 36.3 percent in the Atlantic Tobacco region (parts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia). Unemployment among black adults ranged from 15.1 percent in the Delta Crop region to 8.9 percent in the East Texas Beef region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas). Growth in jobs between 1970 and 1980 ranged from 4.4 percent in the Delta Crop region to 29.9 percent in the East Texas Beef region.

Keywords: Black farmers, poverty, economic growth, South, metro areas, nonmetro areas, race.

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Summary

Black farmers tend to live in slowly growing southern counties where nonfarm employment opportunities are limited. Those counties have grown slowly compared with southern metro areas. The counties where black farmers live also contain about two-thirds of all nonmetro southern blacks. Blacks face severe economic and social conditions in these counties. They have a higher incidence of poverty, much less education, and higher unemployment than other blacks in the South. However, growth and socioeconomic conditions vary considerably among the counties.

To study the social and economic conditions in areas where black farmers live, the authors identified 342 southern counties that had at least 25 black farmers each. They divided the study counties into five categories, four of which reflected the most common commodity type of black-operated farm and one which did not exhibit any common black-operated farm type.

Among the four classifiable regions, the authors concluded that social and economic conditions of blacks varied considerably, but blacks always lagged behind whites. Here is a comparison of the four study regions and all study counties in 1980:

- Atlantic Tobacco Region (parts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia)—36.3 percent of blacks in poverty (1979), 11.7 percent of whites; 34.8 percent of blacks graduated from high school, 54.5 percent of whites; 11.3 percent of black adults unemployed, 4.6 percent of whites; number of jobs increased 17.7 percent (1970-80).

- Delta Crop Region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi)—56.3 percent of blacks in poverty (1979), 15.9 percent of whites; 25.3 percent of blacks graduated from high school, 54 percent of whites; 15.1 percent of black adults unemployed, 5 percent of whites; number of jobs increased 4.4 percent (1970-80).

- East South Central Beef Region (parts of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi)—46.1 percent of blacks in poverty (1979), 14.1 percent of whites; 31 percent of blacks graduated from high school, 60.2 percent of whites; 13.4 percent of black adults unemployed, 4.9 percent of whites; number of jobs increased 13.2 percent (1970-80).

- East Texas Beef Region (parts of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas)—39.9 percent of blacks in poverty (1979), 12.9 percent of whites; 36.8 percent of blacks graduated from high school, 55.9 percent of whites; 8.9 percent of black adults unemployed, 3.8 percent of whites; number of jobs increased 29.9 percent (1970-80).

- All study counties—41.4 percent of blacks in poverty (1979), 12.9 percent of whites; 32.3 percent of blacks graduated from high school, 55.5 percent of whites; 11.7 percent of black adults unemployed, 4.8 percent of whites; number of jobs increased 19.2 percent (1970-80).

Employment growth in the study counties varied by study region, ranging from 29.9 percent in the East Texas Beef region to 4.4 percent in the Delta Crop region. Blacks in the Delta Crop region were particularly disadvantaged, with a higher poverty rate, higher unemployment, and lower education levels than blacks in other study regions.

Glossary

Civilian labor force. People employed and unemployed, at least 16 years old, excluding inmates of institutions and members of the armed forces. The labor force participation rate is the percentage of the civilian population at least 16 years old and in the civilian labor force, that is, either working or seeking work. (See *Employed* and *Unemployed*.)

Earnings (***earned income***). The sum of wages and salaries, other labor income, and proprietors' income.

Employed. Civilians at least 16 years of age who worked for wages and salaries, who worked 15 hours per week as unpaid workers in a family enterprise, or who were self-employed.

Farm. In both the *1980 Census of Population* and *1978 Census of Agriculture*, a farm is defined as a place with at least $1,000 of farm product sales. In the *Census of Agriculture*, places with farm product sales of less than $1,000 may also be classified as farms if they normally would have sold at least $1,000 of farm products.

High school graduates. Persons 25 years old or older who graduated from high school. The percentage of the population graduating from high school is obtained by dividing the number of graduates by the population 25 years old or older

Labor force participation rate. See *Civilian labor force*.

Metro areas. Counties that are part of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. (See *Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area*.)

Nonmetro areas. Counties that lie outside of a Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. (See *Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area*.)

Other labor income. Largely employer contributions to private pension and welfare funds.

Personal income. Total income individuals receive in the form of wages and salaries, other labor income, proprietors' income, property income, and transfer payments less contributions for social insurance.

Poverty. The Bureau of the Census determined poverty status by comparing 1979 family income with a poverty threshold that varies with family size and composition. For example, a family of four with two children was poor in 1979 if its income was below $7,356. An area's poverty is measured by its poverty rate, the percentage of its population that falls below the poverty threshold. Both the count of the poor and the count of the population exclude inmates of institutions, members of the Armed Forces in barracks, college students in dormitories, and individuals younger than 15 years old not living with relatives.

Property Income. Dividends, interest, and rent.

Proprietors' income. Income earned by sole proprietors and partners (income of the self-employed).

Rural. Not urban (See *Urban*). The rural population is broken into two groups, rural farm and rural nonfarm. Rural farm people live on farms, while rural nonfarm people do not. Rural nonfarm people may live in the open countryside or in places with a population smaller than 2,500 that are not located in an urbanized area. (See *Farm* and *Urbanized areas*.) Rural is not synonymous with nonmetro. (See *Nonmetro areas* and *Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA)*.) One can be both rural and metro. For example, a person living in the open country or in a small city with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants in a fringe SMSA county would be both metro and rural.

Service industries. Transportation, communications, public utilities, wholesale and retail trade, finance, insurance, real estate, business services, agricultural services, and personal services.

South. The South in this study includes Delaware, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). A county or a group of counties containing at least one central city with a population of 50,000 or more, or a central city with a population of at least 25,000 if the city's population plus the population of contiguous thickly populated places equals 50,000 or more. Additional contiguous counties are considered part of an SMSA if they are economically and socially integrated with the central city. The metro counties used in this study were so designated by the Office of Management and Budget as of 1974.

Transfer payments. Payments for which no work was done in the current time period. Transfer payments are largely from government programs, such as Social Security, unemployment compensation, Medicare, and public assistance (welfare).

Unemployed. Civilians at least 16 years of age who were looking for work or on layoff waiting to be called back to a job. The unemployment rate is the proportion of the labor force that is unemployed. (See *Civilian labor force*.)

Urban. The urban population lives in either urbanized areas or places with a population of 2,500 or more. (See *Urbanized areas*.) The remaining population is rural. Urban is not synonymous with metro. For example, a person living in a city of 2,500 or more in a county outside an SMSA is both nonmetro and urban.

Urbanized areas. Areas having a total population of at least 50,000 and a population density of at least 1,000 per square mile. An urbanized area generally consists of a central city and its surrounding, densely settled suburbs. Urbanized area and metro area are not synonymous. Some parts of metropolitan counties are too sparsely populated to be classified as urbanized.

Social and Economic Environment of Black Farmers

Robert A. Hoppe, Herman Bluestone, and Virginia K. Getz*

Introduction

Black farming families in the United States are concentrated in rural southern counties that have not fully benefited from recent national economic growth. These counties' populations are either growing slowly or declining, and their nonfarm economies have not expanded rapidly enough to fully absorb growth in the labor force. Nonfarm employment is potentially important to black farming families because their farms tend to be smaller, less fertile, and less mechanized than average farms (*7*, *8*).[1] A growing nonfarm economy can provide jobs to supplement farm income or to employ those who decide to leave farming.

This report focuses on the social and economic environment in the areas where black farmers live. We compare social and economic conditions of blacks and whites in 342 nonmetro southern counties that had 25 or more black farmers in 1978. Blacks in these study counties are both socially and economically disadvantaged. Another U.S. Department of Agriculture publication, *Black Farmers and Their Farms*, examines black farmers in relation to other farmers nationally and in the South (*1*).

Because almost 95 percent of the Nation's black farmers live in the South, we restrict our analysis to that region. We divide our analysis into four parts:

- First, we identify the counties where most black farmers live.
- Second, we briefly examine characteristics of black farmers in these study counties.
- Third, we compare social and economic conditions in counties which have a concentration of black farmers with conditions in other southern counties. We also compare social and economic conditions of blacks and whites in the study counties.
- Fourth, we compare social and economic conditions among four study regions where black farmers are concentrated. Again, we also compare social and economic conditions of blacks and whites in the study regions.

Location of Black Farmers

In 1978, the study counties contained almost half (46.3 percent) of the South's 55,000 black farmers and 71.8 percent of the 35,000 southern black farmers for whom county data were available.[2] Black farmers in the study counties made up only 9.7 percent of all farmers in these counties in 1978.

We intended to limit the study to counties with relatively heavy concentrations of black farmers, but we realized that such a limitation would drastically reduce the number of black farmers covered. For example, restricting the study to counties where 100 or more black farmers lived and where at least 20 percent of the farmers were black would have reduced the number of study counties to 31 and the percentage of black farmers covered to only 17.7 percent of the total for which county data were available.

One of our major findings is that most black farmers live in counties that contain few other black farmers. Thus, had we restricted our study to counties with

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[1] Italicized numbers in parentheses identify literature cited in the references at the end of this report.

[2] For more information about statistical coverage of black farmers in study counties, see the appendix. The appendix also identifies the major data sources used in this report.

heavier concentrations of black farmers, we would not have accurately identified the social and economic conditions experienced by most black farmers.

The Study Regions

To study geographic variation in social and economic conditions in the study counties, we tried grouping them in various ways, including by most common commodity type of black-operated farm, number of black farmers, percentage of farmers who were black, degree of urbanization, and percentage of total income from farming. However, we found that classification by most common commodity type of black-operated farm provided the most satisfactory basis for studying geographic variation in the socioeconomic conditions of the study counties.

In 1978, black farmers tended to specialize in four commodities or groups of commodities: beef cattle, other livestock, tobacco, and cash grain (table 1).[3] The Bureau of the Census classified each farm by commodity type on the basis of the commodity or group of commodities accounting for at least 50 percent of its total farm sales (*11*).

We identified four major geographic clusters of counties that differed in commodity specialization (fig. 1).[4] The beef cattle farm is the most common type of black-operated farm in two clusters, one centered in East Texas and another largely in Mississippi and Alabama. We refer to these two clusters of counties as the East Texas Beef study region and the East South Central (ESC) Beef study region.

Most black farmers in a third county cluster, located largely in the Mississippi Delta, specialize in cash grain or cotton, while black farmers in a fourth group of counties, clustered along the Atlantic coast, specialize in tobacco. We called these two clusters the Delta Crop study region and the Atlantic Tobacco study region. The remaining study counties did not fall into neat clusters and were left unclassified. Because the black-operated farms in the unclassified counties are not homogeneous, we did not analyze them as a separate group.

Characteristics of Black-Operated Farms

Blacks operated only 9.7 percent of all farms in the study counties in 1978. The percentage ranged from 4.9 percent in the East Texas Beef study region to 15.6 percent in the ESC Beef study region (table 2). While data on the number of black farmers from the *1982 Census of Agriculture* (*14*) are not fully comparable with data from the 1978 Census, indications are that the number of black farmers dropped sharply in the Atlantic Tobacco region and the Delta Crop region. The large decline in the Atlantic Tobacco region appears to be partly explained by continued mechanization of flue-cured tobacco (*4*). Another explanation may be the decline in flue-cured acreage allotments.[5]

Table 1—Black-operated farms in study counties, by commodity type, 1978

Type of farm	Total	Share of total
	Number	*Percent*[1]
Beef cattle (except feedlots)	5,923	23.4
Other livestock	4,710	18.6
Cash grain	5,422	21.5
Tobacco	5,165	20.4
Cotton	946	3.7
Vegetable and melon	683	2.7
Other crops	2,414	9.6
Total	25,263	100.0

[1]Totals may not add due to rounding.
Source: (*12*).

Off-Farm Work

As a whole, black farmers in the study counties depended less on off-farm work than did farmers in general. Considerable geographic variation existed, however. Black farmers worked off their farms about the same as all farmers in the Atlantic Tobacco study region, slightly more in the Delta Crop region, and considerably less in the two beef regions.

Nevertheless, black farmers worked off their farms more in the beef study regions than black farmers in the crop and tobacco regions. Many of the black farmers in the beef regions appeared to be part-time farmers. Beef farms can use buildings and hilly land that otherwise would have little use, and these farms have relatively flexible labor requirements (*5*). Thus, a beef operation dovetails well with a job off the farm.

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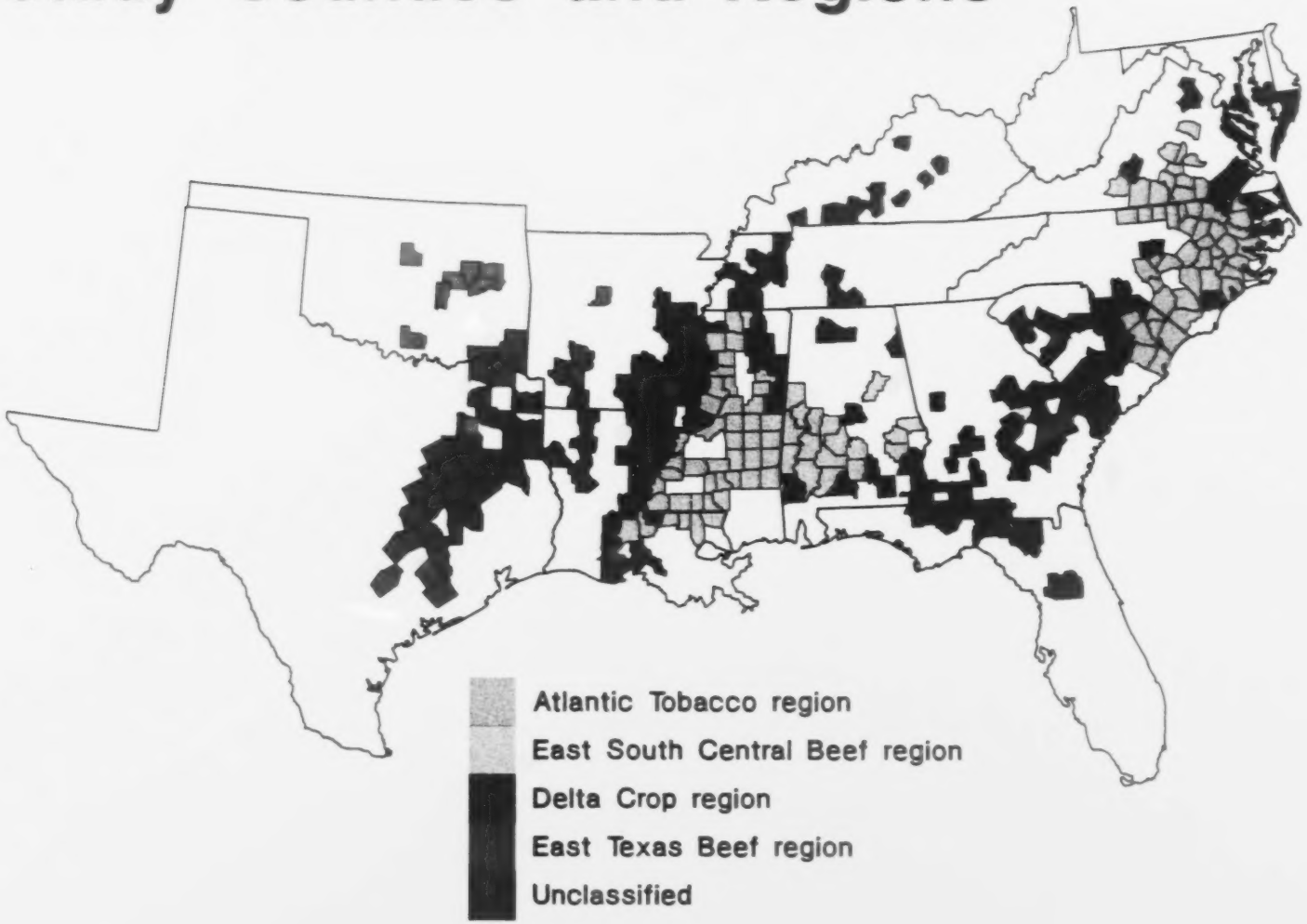
[3]As defined here, grains include wheat, rice, corn, barley, sorghum, and oats. However, the Census data used here also classify certain legumes, such as soybeans, lentils, and dry field peas, as grains.

[4]Although we used black-operated farm characteristics to delineate regions, one should remember that black farmers are relatively rare in the United States. Black farmers made up no more than 15.6 percent of all farms in any of the regions delineated.

[5]Information on allotments and demand for tobacco came from (*9*) and from Verner M. Grise, National Economics Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Figure 1

Study Counties and Regions



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Land Tenure

About the same percentage of black farmers as all farmers were tenants in our study counties. The tenancy rate was actually lower for black farmers than for all farmers in the Atlantic Tobacco region. The highest tenancy rates for both blacks and all farmers among the study counties were in the Delta Crop region.

Farm Size

Black-operated farms in the study counties in 1978 averaged 99 acres, compared with 258 acres for all farms (table 2). The average size of all farms exceeded the average size of black farms in all study regions. The difference ranged from 87 acres in the Atlantic Tobacco region to 403 acres in the Delta crop region.

Table 2—Characteristics of black-operated farms and black farmers in study counties by region, 1978

Item	All study counties	Study regions			
		Atlantic Tobacco	Delta Crop	East South Central Beef	East Texas Beef
			Number		
Study counties	342	51	34	62	55
Black-operated farms	25,263	7,121	2,047	5,696	2,758
			Percent		
Share of total farms	9.7	13.2	11.2	15.6	4.9
Farmer characteristics:					
Under 35 years old—					
All farmers	13.8	15.3	18.2	11.8	10.7
Black farmers	7.6	7.3	10.6	6.0	5.0
65 years old or older—					
All farmers	19.0	15.8	14.1	22.0	22.7
Black farmers	31.4	25.3	30.1	38.4	41.2
Worked off-farm 100 or more days—					
All farmers	45.2	34.5	31.6	50.6	56.7
Black farmers	38.4	33.3	34.0	40.4	45.1
Tenants—					
All farmers	12.2	19.0	21.3	7.7	8.6
Black farmers	13.1	16.4	21.8	9.0	8.3
Farms with annual sales:					
$40,000 or more—					
All farms	19.2	25.0	36.7	15.3	10.2
Black-operated farm	4.2	6.0	4.5	1.2	1.7
$20,000 or more—					
All farms	29.4	40.2	47.7	21.4	17.1
Black-operated farms	10.2	16.4	12.2	3.0	3.4
Less than $2,500—					
All farms	25.7	16.8	17.5	38.6	31.2
Black-operated farms	46.1	28.2	32.3	68.5	61.2
			Acres		
Average farm size:					
All farms	258	156	514	273	296
Black-operated farms	99	69	111	103	133
			Percent		
Farmland in harvested crops:					
All farms	38.5	41.2	76.1	27.6	16.9
Black-operated farms	33.9	34.2	69.5	17.3	14.1

Sources: (*12*, *13*).

Black farmers in every study region also harvested a smaller proportion of their land in 1978 than did all farmers. We are unable to tell from the data whether blacks farmed less intensively than whites or if black-owned land was less suited for crop production. A larger percentage of land was harvested by both blacks and all farmers in the crop and tobacco regions than in the beef regions.

Blacks also operated rather small farms in 1978 when size was measured by volume of sales. Less than 5 percent of all black farmers sold more than $40,000 worth of farm products in 1978, and only 10 percent had sales over $20,000. Sales amounted to less than $2,500 for 46.1 percent of all black-operated farms. The percentage of black farms with sales over $40,000 was largest in the Atlantic Tobacco region and smallest in the beef regions.

Age of Black Farmers

In each region, proportionately fewer black farmers were young (less than 35 years old) and more were elderly (at least 65 years old) than farmers in general. The age distribution of black farmers varied by study region. The Delta Crop region had the highest percentage of young black farmers (10.6) and the East Texas Beef region had the lowest percentage (5). The percentage of elderly farmers ranged from 25.3 in the Atlantic Tobacco region to 41.2 in the East Texas Beef region.

Study Counties Compared with Other Southern Counties

Study counties differed from other Southern counties in economic structure, recent growth, and demographic characteristics.

Economic Structure, 1980

The study counties represented only a small part of the southern economy in 1980. They contained only 13.5 percent of the region's total population, 11.9 percent of its employment, and 10.3 percent of its personal income (table 3). They made up a larger part of the South's nonmetro economy: 36.8 percent of the nonmetro South's population, 36.8 percent of its employment, and 34.7 percent of its personal income. The study counties were economically similar to other nonmetro counties, but markedly different from southern metro counties.

Per capita income averaged $6,559 in the study counties in 1980, some $629 less than in other southern nonmetro counties and $2,982 less than in southern metro counties. Transfer payments provided about 17.7 percent of personal income in the study counties, about the same as in other southern nonmetro counties, but approximately 5 percentage points more than in southern metro counties.

Group statistics mask considerable variation among counties in dependence on transfer payments. For example, transfer payments made up at least 25 percent of personal income in 29 study counties; 13 of these counties were in Mississippi. Transfer payments accounted for the largest share of study county income, 32 percent, in Holmes County, Mississippi, and McIntosh County, Oklahoma.

Study counties differed little from other southern nonmetro counties in the distribution of employment among industries. Farming and manufacturing provided proportionately more jobs in both study counties and other southern nonmetro counties than in the metro South, and service industries provided fewer jobs. Nevertheless, the service industries made up the largest employment sector in all county groups. In both the study counties and other nonmetro counties, about 16 percent of all workers were self-employed (proprietors) compared with only 7 percent in the metro South.

Economic Changes During the Seventies

Population and employment increased less in the study counties between 1970 and 1980 than in other nonmetro counties and metro counties (table 4). Even so, the study county population growth rate (13.7 percent) was above the national average (11.4 percent). Per capita income increased by about the same percentage in the study counties as in other Southern nonmetro and metro counties.[6] However, dollar increases in per capita personal income were less in the study counties than in the other two county groups.

Transfer payments, property income, and earnings provided about the same shares of personal income growth in the study counties as in other nonmetro counties. Earnings were a smaller source of income growth and transfer payments a larger source in both kinds of southern nonmetro counties than in southern metro counties.

Sources of employment growth varied among the three county groups. Farming declined as a source of employment in both groups of southern nonmetro

[6]Growth in per capita personal income was greater than inflation in all groups. The consumer price index grew by 112.2 percent, from 64.1 in 1970 to 136.0 in 1980 (17).

counties during the seventies, but the decline was larger in the study counties than in other nonmetro counties. Although service, government, and manufacturing were leading sources of new jobs in all southern county groups, the service sector created only about half as many jobs per thousand workers in the nonmetro as in metro areas. Manufacturing was a more important growth source in the study counties than in the other county groups; government was most important in the metro South.

Demographic Characteristics, 1980

As expected, blacks made up a much larger part of the total population in study counties than in the other two county groups (table 5). In 1980, some 32.3 percent of all residents of study counties were black, compared with only 9.7 percent in other southern nonmetro counties and 19 percent in the metro South. About 66 percent of the nonmetro blacks in the South lived in the study counties.

Black poverty was a severe problem in the study counties; 41.4 percent of all blacks in these counties were poor, compared with 34.6 percent in other southern nonmetro counties and 28.9 percent in southern metro counties. The black poverty rate exceeded 50 percent in 56 study counties, peaking at 67.2 percent in Tunica County, Mississippi.

The difference in black poverty rates between the study counties and other nonmetro counties was much greater than one would expect from the per capita personal income figures in table 3. Per capita personal income was only 9.6 percent higher in the other nonmetro counties than in the study counties (table 3), but the black poverty rate was 19.7 percent higher in the study counties than in the other nonmetro counties (table 5). Per capita income, a highly aggregate measure, masks the concentration of blacks at the lower end of the income distribution in the study counties.

Table 3—Economic characteristics by type of southern county, 1980

Item	Nonmetro counties			Metro counties	Total
	Study	Other	Total		
			Number		
Counties	342	783	1,125	300	1,425
			Millions		
Population	10.2	17.5	27.7	47.7	75.4
Employment	4.2	7.1	11.4	23.8	35.2
			Billion dollars		
Personal income	66.9	125.9	192.7	457.2	650.0
			Dollars		
Per capita personal income	6,559	7,188	6,957	9,541	8,594
			Percent		
Sources of personal income:					
Transfer payments	17.7	17.3	17.4	12.5	14.0
Property income	13.7	15.1	14.6	14.7	14.7
Earnings	68.6	67.6	68.0	72.8	71.3
Sources of employment:					
Farm proprietors	8.6	7.9	8.1	1.0	3.3
Nonfarm proprietors	7.2	8.3	7.9	5.8	6.5
Wage and salary workers	84.2	83.9	84.0	93.2	90.2
Farming	4.0	2.7	3.2	.5	1.4
Mining	1.2	3.6	2.7	1.3	1.7
Construction	4.0	4.2	4.1	5.4	5.0
Manufacturing	22.7	21.9	22.2	14.9	17.3
Service	33.5	33.6	33.6	50.5	45.0
Government	18.8	17.8	18.2	20.6	19.8

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

Sources: (*16*, *18*).

The higher incidence of black poverty in the study counties may be partially attributed to blacks' low educational attainment, low labor force participation rate, and high unemployment rate. In the study counties, only 32.3 percent of black people over 25 years of age had completed high school in 1980, compared with 36.2 percent in other nonmetro counties and 51 percent in the metro South. The black labor force participation rate was 3.4 percentage points lower in the study counties than in other nonmetro counties and 9.3 percent lower than in metro counties. The black unemployment rate was 11.7 percent in the study counties, compared with 10.6 percent in other nonmetro counties and 9.6 percent in metro counties.

On the other hand, the percentage of families headed by a woman with no husband present, another social indicator linked with poverty (*3*), was about the same for blacks in the study counties as in other nonmetro counties in the South. Both groups of nonmetro counties had a slightly smaller percentage of black families headed by women than southern metro counties.

Blacks were worse off than whites in all groups of counties. However, differences between blacks and whites in terms of poverty, educational attainment, labor force participation, and unemployment were far larger in the study counties than in other types of counties. For example, poverty rates for blacks exceeded rates for whites by almost 29 percentage points in the study counties, compared with only about 20 percentage points in other nonmetro and metro counties in the South.

Several factors may have contributed to the low socioeconomic status of blacks in relation to whites in the study counties. The increased use of farm machinery may be one cause. Black labor was significant in the farm sector in the past. Machinery has decreased the demand for unskilled labor provided by the black population, tending to lower black labor force participation and socioeconomic status in cer-

Table 4—Economic growth indicators by type of southern county, 1970-80

Item	Nonmetro counties			Metro counties	Total
	Study	Other	Total		
			Percent		
Change, 1970-80:					
Population	13.7	20.4	17.9	21.3	20.0
Employment	19.2	24.7	22.6	35.1	30.8
Per capita personal income—					
Percentage change	157.7	156.8	157.5	151.0	153.4
			Dollars		
Dollars	4,014	4,389	4,255	5,740	5,203
			Percent		
Sources of personal income growth, 1970-80:					
Transfer payments	20.0	19.3	19.5	14.2	15.8
Property income	15.0	16.6	16.0	15.3	15.5
Earnings	65.0	64.2	64.5	70.5	68.7
			Jobs per 1,000 workers		
Sources of employment growth, 1970-80:[1]					
Farm proprietors	-21.7	-12.0	-15.8	-2.0	-6.8
Nonfarm proprietors	17.9	23.7	21.5	22.2	21.9
Wage and salary workers	195.9	235.6	220.4	330.8	292.8
Farming	-7.7	-2.4	-4.4	-.5	-1.9
Mining	6.2	18.0	13.5	8.6	10.3
Construction	15.2	16.9	16.3	20.4	19.0
Manufacturing	49.7	37.3	42.0	30.5	34.5
Service	93.0	118.7	108.9	218.9	181.0
Government	39.4	47.1	44.1	52.9	49.9
Total	192.1	247.2	226.1	350.9	307.8

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

[1]Growth = $\frac{\text{(1980 industry's employment - 1970 industry's employment) x 1,000}}{\text{total 1970 employment in all industries}}$

Sources: (*15, 16, 18*).

tain counties where many blacks left agriculture and other industries did not expand to hire the surplus labor.

Discrimination must be considered as an explanation of blacks' low socioeconomic status in the study counties. In a recent study in eight rural counties in the Deep South, over 40 percent of the blacks felt that racial discrimination was the main reason that local blacks did not make more progress. Over 40 percent of the blacks also believed that local governments favored whites over blacks. Whites in the eight counties, however, generally felt that racial discrimination was not a major problem. White respondents also believed that local government was fair to both races (*6*).

The dual labor market theory may also help explain the low status of blacks in the study counties. The dual labor market theory holds that the labor market is made up of a primary market and a secondary market (*2*). The primary market pays high wages, provides good working conditions, offers employment stability and chances for advancement, and administers work rules fairly. The secondary sector, on the other hand, offers low wages, poor working conditions, unstable employment, few chances for advancement, and arbitrary administration of work rules. Disadvantaged workers, such as blacks, are concentrated in the secondary market by residence, inadequate skills, poor work history, and discrimination. If blacks in the study counties are more concentrated in the secondary market than blacks

Table 5—Population characteristics by type of southern county and race, 1980

Item	Nonmetro counties			Metro counties	Total
	Study	Other	Total		
			Percent		
Blacks[1]	32.3	9.7	18.0	19.0	18.6
65 years old or older[1]	12.3	13.0	12.7	10.4	11.2
Blacks	10.7	9.5	10.3	7.6	8.6
Whites	13.0	13.4	13.3	11.3	12.1
In poverty (1979)[2]	22.3	17.2	19.0	13.2	15.4
Blacks	41.4	34.6	39.1	28.9	32.5
Whites	12.9	14.9	14.3	9.1	11.0
Graduated from high school[3]	49.0	51.1	50.4	65.9	60.2
Blacks	32.3	36.2	33.6	51.0	45.0
Whites	55.5	52.8	53.6	69.3	63.5
Living in rural areas (all races):[1]					
On farm	5.4	5.0	5.1	.8	2.4
Off farm	57.5	57.5	57.5	15.3	30.8
Unemployment rate[4]	6.7	6.6	6.6	5.2	5.7
Blacks	11.7	10.6	11.3	9.6	10.1
Whites	4.8	6.1	5.7	4.2	4.7
Labor force participation rate[5]	56.5	56.0	56.2	62.7	60.3
Blacks	52.1	55.5	53.2	61.4	58.4
Whites	58.5	56.1	56.8	62.8	60.6
Families with a woman as head of household, no husband present[6]	15.3	11.2	12.7	15.0	14.2
Black	32.3	32.5	32.3	36.1	34.8
White	9.0	9.3	9.2	10.7	10.1

[1]Share of population.
[2]Share of noninstitutionalized population.
[3]Share of population at least 25 years old.
[4]Share of labor force.
[5]Share of population at least 16 years old either working or seeking work.
[6]Share of families.

Source: (*16*).

elsewhere, they will tend to have lower socioeconomic status in relation to local whites.

Whites are better off in the study counties than in other nonmetro counties. Whites have a lower poverty rate, a higher labor force participation rate, and a lower unemployment rate in the study counties than in other nonmetro counties. The dual labor market theory may also help explain this phenomenon. The secondary labor market probably draws heavily from the white population in other nonmetro counties because blacks make up such a small portion of the population. In the study counties, however, blacks are a much larger share of the population and undoubtedly make up a larger portion of the secondary market. Whites are better off in the study counties because proportionately fewer whites are in the secondary market in the study counties than in other nonmetro counties.

Variation in Social and Economic Conditions

Not only do study counties, on average, differ socially and economically from metro and other nonmetro counties in the South, but conditions in the study counties also vary considerably by study region.

Economic Structure, 1980

Per capita income in 1980 ranged from $5,755 in the Delta to $7,364 in East Texas (table 6). Transfer payments in 1980 provided about a fifth of total personal income in the Delta Crop and ESC Beef regions, the two study regions with the lowest incomes. Although transfer payments accounted for the largest share of personal income in the Delta, that study region actually had lower per capita transfer payments than did the East Texas Beef and ESC Beef regions. Even small transfer payments can make up a large share of total personal income in a low-income area.

The distribution of employment across industries in 1980 differed from that for all study counties much more in the East Texas Beef and Delta Crop regions than in the other two regions. Hired farm workers in the Delta Crop region accounted for 10.3 percent of total employment, compared with only 4 percent for all study counties. The region is characterized by large farms and plantations that require hired workers. Although the service sector was the largest sector in all study regions, it was particularly large in the Delta Crop and East Texas Beef regions. On the other hand, manufacturing provided only 14.3 percent of all Delta jobs, 8.4 percentage points less than for all study counties. In East Texas, a larger percentage of workers were farm and nonfarm proprietors than in the other regions. The East Texas Beef region was similar to the Delta Crop region in that the service industries were relatively more important than for all study counties, and manufacturing was relatively less important.

Economic Changes During the Seventies

By any measure, the East Texas Beef region boomed between 1970 and 1980, while the Delta Crop region languished. The growth rate in the East Texas Beef region exceeded the growth rate in the Delta Crop region by 21.6 percentage points for population, 25.5 percentage points for employment, and 25 percentage points for per capita personal income (table 7). Growth rates in the other two regions generally fell between those for the Delta Crop and East Texas Beef regions.

Rapid growth in East Texas appears to have benefited black farmers. The percentage of black farmers working off the farm 100 or more days a year was highest (45 percent) in the East Texas Beef region (table 2). The high off-farm employment rate may reflect both better economic opportunities in the local East Texas economy and the characteristics of small-scale beef farming. Small beef farms with their flexible labor requirements (5) are particularly well suited to part-time farming.

Only the Delta Crop region lost population during the seventies; population declined in half of the 34 Delta Crop counties. Population change among Delta counties ranged from a decline of 20.5 percent in Quitman, Mississippi, to an increase of 15 percent in Caldwell Parish, Louisiana. By contrast, none of the East Texas Beef counties lost population, and 31 of 55 grew by more than 15 percent during the decade.

Per capita income during the seventies increased least ($3,533) in the slow-growing Delta Crop region and most ($4,771) in the fast-growing East Texas Beef region. Transfer payments and property income became a larger source of income in all regions during the seventies. The percentage of income provided by these two income sources increased 6-8 percentage points in all study regions except the East Texas Beef region, where it increased only 3 percentage points.

Sources of employment change among study counties also varied by study region. Farming was the only industry to become a smaller provider of jobs in all regions during the decade. The decline in the number of farm proprietors was smallest in the East Texas Beef region and greatest in the ESC Beef and

Atlantic Tobacco regions. The Delta Crop region had the largest decline in farm workers, over four times the study county average.

In East Texas, employment growth was more broadly based than in the other regions. Job gains in mining, construction, services, and government were larger in East Texas than in any other region. By contrast, most of the slow-growing Delta Crop region's new jobs were concentrated in services and government. Most employment growth in the ESC Beef and Atlantic Tobacco regions also was concentrated in a few industries, largely manufacturing, services, and government.

Demographic Characteristics, 1980

Blacks formed a larger share of the population in the Delta Crop and ESC Beef regions than in other regions in 1980. Over 40 percent of the population was black in the Delta Crop and ESC Beef regions, compared with 34.1 percent in the Atlantic Tobacco region and 19.8 percent in East Texas Beef region (table 8).

More blacks lived in poverty in the Delta Crop (56.3 percent) and ESC Beef (46.1 percent) regions than in the Atlantic Tobacco (36.3 percent) and East Texas Beef (39.9 percent) regions. Geographic variation in black poverty may be partially explained by variation in educational attainment and local employment opportunities. The percentage of black adults who graduated from high school was lower in the two regions with high black poverty rates than in the other two regions. And, the black unemployment rate in 1980 was higher in the poorer regions. Black labor force participation was lowest in the Delta Crop region, which had the highest black poverty rate,

Table 6—Economic characteristics of study counties, by region, 1980

Item	All study counties	Study regions			
		Atlantic Tobacco	Delta Crop	East South Central Beef	East Texas Beef
			Number		
Counties	342	51	34	62	55
			Thousands		
Population	10,178	2,255	826	1,648	1,498
Employment	4,226	1,010	306	624	609
			Billion dollars		
Personal income	66.9	14.8	4.8	10.0	11.1
			Dollars		
Per capita personal income	6,559	6,580	5,755	6,507	7,364
			Percent		
Sources of personal income:					
Transfer payments	17.7	16.3	20.6	19.9	17.2
Property income	13.7	12.2	15.3	12.0	17.3
Earnings	68.6	71.5	64.1	68.1	65.5
Sources of employment:					
Farm proprietors	8.6	7.8	8.9	8.9	11.1
Nonfarm proprietors	7.2	6.6	7.1	6.7	8.7
Wage and salary workers	84.2	85.6	84.0	84.4	80.1
Farming	4.0	4.7	10.3	2.4	2.1
Mining	1.2	.3	1.0	1.7	3.7
Construction	4.0	3.9	3.0	3.7	4.5
Manufacturing	22.7	25.3	14.3	21.7	17.7
Service	33.5	31.3	37.1	34.1	36.1
Government	18.8	20.0	18.2	20.8	16.9

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

Sources: (*16, 18*).

and highest in the Atlantic Tobacco region, which had the lowest black poverty rate.

The percentage of black families headed by a woman with no husband present showed less variation than other social and economic indicators, but was highest in the Delta Crop region.

Whites were better off than blacks in all study regions in 1980, but racial differences in poverty, unemployment, and educational attainment were greater in the Delta Crop and ESC Beef regions than in the other two regions.

Conclusions and Implications

Black farmers are concentrated in slow-growing areas where employment opportunities are limited. Economic and social conditions in the study counties were far worse than conditions in metro areas of the South. Employment, population, and income have also grown much more slowly in the study counties than in metro counties of the South. Growth in the study counties also lags somewhat behind growth in other nonmetro southern counties.

The socioeconomic status of blacks was particularly low in the study counties in 1980. Blacks in those counties have a higher incidence of poverty, much less education, a lower labor force participation rate, and a higher unemployment rate than in other southern counties. And, disparities between blacks and whites in poverty rates, level of educational attainment, labor force participation, and unemployment are all far wider in the study counties than elsewhere.

Table 7—Economic growth indicators for study counties by region, 1970-80

Item	All study counties	Study regions: Atlantic Tobacco	Delta Crop	East South Central Beef	East Texas Beef
			Percent		
Change 1970-80:					
Population	13.7	14.1	-1.2	9.9	20.4
Employment	19.2	17.7	4.4	13.2	29.9
Per capita personal income—					
Percentage change	157.7	143.6	159.0	164.8	184.0
			Dollars		
Dollar change	4,014	3,879	3,533	3,770	4,771
			Percent		
Sources of personal income growth, 1970-80:					
Transfer payments	20.0	19.6	23.2	22.2	17.3
Property income	15.0	13.2	17.9	13.0	18.4
Earnings	65.0	67.2	58.8	64.8	64.3
			Jobs per 1,000 workers		
Sources of employment growth, 1970-80:[1]					
Farm proprietors	-21.7	-32.8	-24.1	-32.6	-6.0
Nonfarm proprietors	17.9	17.9	15.4	13.9	23.3
Wage and salary workers	195.9	191.6	54.2	152.3	280.9
Farming	-7.7	-9.5	-34.0	-12.0	-6.6
Mining	6.2	1.3	2.9	7.4	25.7
Construction	15.2	10.8	5.2	15.6	23.0
Manufacturing	49.7	65.9	8.0	25.9	65.6
Service	93.0	89.3	49.6	79.4	122.0
Government	39.4	33.7	22.5	36.0	51.0
Total	192.1	176.7	45.5	133.5	298.1

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

[1]Growth = $\frac{\text{(1980 industry's employment - 1970 industry's employment) x 1,000}}{\text{total 1970 employment in all industries}}$

Sources: (*15, 16, 18*).

Economic growth in the study counties varied considerably by region, ranging from fast in the East Texas Beef region to slow in the Delta Crop region. The seventies' growth rate for the East Texas Beef region exceeded the rate for the Delta Crop region by 21.6 percentage points for population, 25.5 percentage points for employment, and 25 percentage points for per capita income. The East Texas Beef region's employment growth was well distributed across all nonfarm industries, while the Delta Crop region's was concentrated in the service industries and government. The decline in farm proprietors per 1,000 workers was five times as great in the Delta Crop region as in the East Texas Beef region. Although the black poverty rate was high (39.9 percent) in the East Texas Beef region, it was even higher (56.3 percent) in the Delta Crop region. The black unemployment rate in 1980 also was much higher in the Delta Crop region (15.1 percent) than in the East Texas Beef region (8.9 percent).

These findings suggest that policies and programs to assist black farmers need to be tailored to the kind of areas in which they live and to the type of farming they practice. For example, in areas of rapid employment growth, such as the East Texas Beef region, assuring black farmers equal access to credit and extension programs and encouraging part-time farming may be the most appropriate policy emphasis. Many of the black farmers in the East Texas Beef region appear to raise a few head of cattle and work off their farms. On the other hand, slow employment

Table 8—Population characteristics of study counties by region, 1980

Item	All study counties	Study regions			
		Atlantic Tobacco	Delta Crop	East South Central Beef	East Texas Beef
			Percent		
Blacks[1]	32.3	34.1	44.7	41.4	19.8
65 years old or older[1]	12.3	10.2	13.0	12.4	15.9
Blacks	10.7	8.8	12.6	11.1	15.7
Whites	13.0	11.0	12.9	12.8	16.4
In poverty (1979)[2]	22.3	20.5	33.9	27.3	18.7
Blacks	41.4	36.3	56.3	46.1	39.9
Whites	12.9	11.7	15.9	14.1	12.9
Graduated from high school[3]	49.0	48.3	43.2	49.9	52.2
Blacks	32.3	34.8	25.3	31.0	36.8
Whites	55.5	54.5	54.0	60.2	55.9
Living in rural areas (all races):[1]					
On farm	5.4	6.4	5.7	3.7	5.1
Off farm	57.5	60.6	51.0	61.0	48.7
Unemployment rate[4]	6.7	6.7	8.5	7.8	4.7
Blacks	11.7	11.3	15.1	13.4	8.9
Whites	4.8	4.6	5.0	4.9	3.8
Labor force participation rate[5]	56.5	60.1	50.1	53.1	53.8
Blacks	52.1	56.2	43.8	48.6	48.0
Whites	58.5	62.1	54.4	55.7	55.2
Families with a woman as head of household, no husband present[6]	15.3	16.1	18.6	17.1	12.1
Black	32.3	31.1	35.3	32.4	31.9
White	9.0	9.8	8.6	8.8	8.0

[1]Share of population.
[2]Share of noninstitutionalized population.
[3]Share of population at least 25 years old.
[4]Share of labor force.
[5]Share of population at least 16 years old either working or seeking work.
[6]Share of families.

Source: (*16*).

growth and continued population loss in other areas, such as the Delta Crop region, suggest that some black farmers cannot rely on local off-farm employment to supplement their farm income. Many of these black farm families may have to migrate to other areas in order to find more attractive economic opportunities.

Many black farm families would be better off financially if they left agriculture. Most black-operated farms are very small and cannot provide enough income to adequately support a family. Thus, the most effective policy for helping many black farmers may be to encourage economic growth in depressed rural areas for those who decide to leave farming. More education and job training in these areas could also help black farmers make the transition to nonfarm work. Black farmers who want to continue farming, but are not economically able to do so, will undoubtedly find the transition to nonfarm work traumatic, even if they eventually improve their lot.

Although most black farmers operate small farms, not all do. About 4 percent of black farmers in the study counties had sales of at least $40,000. Percentages of black farms with sales of $40,000 or more ranged from 1.2 percent in the ESC Beef region to 6 percent in the Atlantic Tobacco region. For these commercial farmers, the economic health of agriculture in general is important.

Finally, 31.4 percent of the black farmers in the study counties were 65 years old or older. For these farmers, the major transfer programs directed specifically toward the elderly (Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, and Medicare) are critically important. Changes in these programs will have a greater effect on elderly black farmers than any other kinds of programs, including rural development programs, farm programs, educational programs, or job creation programs.

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Appendix: Data Sources

Most of the county data on the number, location, and characteristics of black farmers are from a special tabulation of the *1978 Census of Agriculture* (*12*). This is the most recent *Census of Agriculture* for which special tabulations on black farmers are available. A special tabulation from the *1982 Census of Agriculture* is planned, but is not yet available.

Income and employment data for counties came from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (*18*). We used these data to compare economic conditions in counties containing concentrations of black farmers with conditions in other counties. We also drew heavily from the 1970 and 1980 *Censuses of Population* for socioeconomic data on blacks and whites (*15*, *16*).

Not all black-operated farms were assigned to counties in the *1978 Census of Agriculture*. In collecting data, the Bureau of the Census first compiled a mailing list from various sources and then mailed questionnaires to farmers on the list (*11*). Farmers then filled out the questionnaires and mailed them back to the Bureau.

The Bureau also sent enumerators to all households in selected rural areas to obtain information for those farmers who were not on the original mailing list. These interviews provided data that were included in national, regional, and State totals. However, these data could not be allocated to individual counties (*11*). Although our study counties contained only 46.3 percent of southern black-operated farms, they contained 71.8 percent of all the black-operated farms assigned to counties by the Bureau of the Census (app. table 1). These percentages varied considerably by State.

Some data for black farms in the study counties were also missing. Because there were so few black farmers in most counties, the Bureau of the Census suppressed these data to prevent disclosure of information about individuals. Suppression of these data rendered county data on total volume of agricultural sales, value of farmland, value of buildings and equipment, acres of various crops, and head of livestock of various species practically worthless. The characteristics of black farmers and black-operated farms presented in text table 2 are for items with relatively minor disclosure problems.

Appendix table 1—Black farmers in the Southern States, 1978

State	Black farmers in all southern counties			Black farmers in study counties		
	Total	Assigned to counties	Not assigned to counties	Total	Percentage of all black farmers	Percentage of all black farmers assigned to counties
	Number			*Percent*		
Alabama	4,791	3,143	1,648	2,348	49.0	74.7
Arkansas	2,067	1,559	508	1,054	51.0	67.6
Delaware	60	42	18	0	0	0
Florida	2,307	999	1,308	565	24.5	56.6
Georgia	4,485	2,648	1,837	1,556	34.7	58.8
Kentucky	1,092	1,028	64	360	33.0	35.0
Louisiana	3,296	1,934	1,362	1,471	44.6	76.1
Maryland	953	564	389	235	24.7	41.7
Mississippi	8,817	4,996	3,821	4,385	49.7	87.8
North Carolina	7,680	5,820	1,860	4,826	62.8	82.9
Oklahoma	851	773	78	415	48.8	53.7
South Carolina	6,451	3,773	2,678	3,101	48.1	82.2
Tennessee	2,405	1,754	651	835	34.7	47.6
Texas	5,420	3,066	2,354	1,855	34.2	60.5
Virginia	3,895	3,075	820	2,257	57.9	73.4
West Virginia	46	33	13	0	0	0
Total	54,616	35,207	19,409	25,263	46.3	71.8

Sources: (*10*,*12*).

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